

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A1WASHINGTON TIMES
15 October 1984

Rostow remarks aid Westmoreland

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NEW YORK — A top adviser to President Lyndon Johnson denied on 31 separate occasions during taped television interviews with CBS that Gen. William C. Westmoreland was involved in any conspiracy to deceive the administration about enemy strength in Vietnam, The Washington Times has learned.

The number of denials was determined from a transcript given to The Washington Times of the three-hour interview of Walt W. Rostow, Mr. Johnson's special assistant for national security affairs. CBS correspondent Mike Wallace conducted the interview.

A But George Allen, a senior analyst at the CIA during the Johnson years, disputed Mr. Rostow's denials of the efforts to deceive the president in a separate CBS interview, instead saying Mr. Rostow himself orchestrated the deception.

Neither the Rostow interview nor the Allen interview was broadcast as part of the documentary "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," a documentary which led Gen. Westmoreland to file a \$120 million libel suit against the network, the show's producer, George Crile, former CIA analyst Samuel Adams (a paid CBS consultant) and Mr. Wallace.

A Despite Mr. Rostow's and others' denials, CBS accused Gen. Westmoreland of leading a "conspiracy" to underreport enemy troop levels when he headed the Military Assis-

tance Command, Vietnam (MACV), during 1967.

But Mr. Allen's statements to CBS, contained in a two-and-one-half minute videotape segment aired yesterday by Cable News Network, clearly suggest attempts were made at some level in the White House to limit the president's access to information about the war in Vietnam to data supportive of policy decisions to continue its prosecution.

"I received a phone call in my office one day from Mr. Rostow," Mr. Allen said in the interview.

He said Mr. Rostow "asked that we prepare a paper that would show progress that was being made in pacification, outlining the progress that was being made."

"I explained to him that, the way I understood the situation at that time, we weren't making progress, and I would not be able to prepare an objective analysis of the situation that would show progress," Mr. Allen said.

"He would say, 'It's got to show progress. I need your paper, the president needs it, in order to support his conversations with people that come to him. We've got to have a paper that will demonstrate the progress that's being made in pacification,'" Mr. Allen quoted Mr. Rostow as having said.

"I said, 'Mr. Rostow, if we undertake that kind of a paper as an objective analysis, the conclusions will not support the point of view that you seem to want it to,'" Mr. Allen said.

"He expressed amazement at my unwillingness to support my president in his time of need. . . . I said

to him point blank: 'Mr. Rostow, it's because I want to support my president that I will not be party to a cooking of the books on Vietnam,'" Mr. Allen continued, adding, "at this point he [Rostow] slammed down the receiver."

He said Mr. Rostow obtained "a summary of extracts from field reports" from another office in the CIA from which evidence of lack of progress in the so-called pacification program — the land war — had been omitted. The omissions were spelled out in a covering memorandum which was removed by Mr. Rostow, Mr. Allen said in the taped interview.

He said that memorandum was replaced by another, hand-written by Mr. Rostow, which said "at last Mr. President, an objective assessment from the Central Intelligence Agency."

"I saw a copy of that buck slip after it was sent to the president to read," Mr. Allen said.

"So Mr. Rostow was distorting to the president the information he was receiving from the CIA — the nature of it," he said.

Mr. Rostow will be the first of dozens of high-ranking Johnson administration officials whose testimony is expected to debunk the CBS program.

Attorneys for Gen. Westmoreland hoped Mr. Rostow's appearance will bolster their claims that the network knew in advance the accusations made against the 70-year-old military commander were false, yet aired them anyway.

The six-man, six-woman federal jury hearing evidence in the case will be shown portions of the interview, which at times takes on an air

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of a debate rather than an impartial questioning.

A transcript of that interview obtained by The Washington Times demonstrates that Mr. Rostow repeatedly told Mr. Wallace and his producer, George Crile, that Gen. Westmoreland never misled the president about enemy forces.

The following are excerpts from that interview:

MR. WALLACE: President Johnson, he had faith in Gen. Westmoreland's reporting on the war?

MR. ROSTOW: Yes, and, as I say, the total reporting that came out of Saigon under [Ambassador Ellsworth] Bunker's direction. And, in fact, he was never taken from the blind side on a major issue.

MR. WALLACE: Never taken from the blind side? He knew how many were coming down from the north? He knew what were, by and large, in those units out there in the field, whether they were VC or North Vietnamese?

MR. ROSTOW: He knew. He didn't try to become an expert on the order of battle. He knew how the battle was going. And he knew, for example, well before Tet that the North Vietnamese were going to make a maximum effort with the VC.

(Moments later, Mr. Wallace turned the question around.)

MR. WALLACE: Everyone wants good news, Lyndon Johnson, Walt Rostow, want good news. How much pressure under those circumstances was there put upon people in Saigon to produce that good news or reports of good news?

MR. ROSTOW: There was no pressure on them to produce reports of good news. . . .

MR. WALLACE: . . . We have talked to, I can tell you now, on the record, all kinds of intelligence analysts who have told us over and over again, and they're ashamed they took part in it, that the books were cooked . . . to show progress where no progress was being made.

MR. ROSTOW: Well, I think you're wrong. . . .

MR. WALLACE: You've told me President Johnson knew about Tet coming.

MR. ROSTOW: Yes, he not only knew, but acted on it.

MR. WALLACE: But apparently didn't know the full details of how many people were coming down from the north.

MR. ROSTOW: He knew it was going to be a maximum effort.

(Throughout the interview, Mr. Rostow attempted to explain to the CBS reporter that President Johnson received intelligence information on enemy troop numbers from several sources, including Gen. Westmoreland's MACV.

(Mr. Rostow said that during 1967 MACV and some CIA analysts disagreed on whether non-combat support troops should be included in the official order of battle reports. But, he emphasized, President Johnson was "fully informed of the debate" between the rival information-gathering agencies.)

MR. ROSTOW: President Johnson had both views. Now, I want you to take this into account, Mike, because this is serious [for] the factual history, and President Johnson was under no doubt that he was about to see a maximum effort by the North Vietnamese.

(Nevertheless, Mr. Wallace con-

tinued his original line of questioning.)

MR. WALLACE: And conceivably, conceivably, he [President Johnson] didn't know how much heavy fighting lay ahead, because he was, because the books had been cooked. Because the bad news had not been sent forward.

MR. ROSTOW: Now, there you are wrong! He absorbed all of this intelligence. . . .

MR. WALLACE: This intelligence didn't come to him!

MR. ROSTOW: You're quite wrong! . . . You're wrong, Mike. Don't keep saying things that are not so. Because, let me nail it down: I sent out early in December of '67 a cable saying evidently that we are going to see a maximum effort.

(Faced with Mr. Rostow's adamant refusals to confirm that enemy troops figures had been manipulated, Mr. Wallace took another tack.)

MR. WALLACE: . . . I'd be grateful if you can speculate: Why would instructions go out to people at MACV to tell their subordinates "We cannot, will not, accept these higher figures for VC units, North Vietnamese units"?

MR. ROSTOW: I know of no such instructions I ever saw or came through me or came through the president.

MR. WALLACE: All right, granted.

MR. ROSTOW: Never!

MR. WALLACE: But, well, then whose. . . .

MR. ROSTOW: Never! I wouldn't have signed it anyway.

MR. WALLACE: Well then, whose notion would it have been? Why. . . .

MR. ROSTOW: I have no idea. You're telling me something I don't know. And I don't know where that, that kind of rule came. It certainly did not come from the president via me. I don't believe it came from the president, he was too experienced

MR. WALLACE: Well, he wouldn't have known. He wouldn't have known about this. He's being told the good news.

MR. ROSTOW: No! Don't tell me that! He was told good news and bad news. No! . . . you haven't got it right!

(During the final minutes of the interview, Mr. Wallace tried for what would be the 31st time to extract a confirmation from the one-time presidential adviser.)

MR. ROSTOW: . . . All I'm saying is that the assessment of the balance of enemy strength against ours was made on much wider evidence and it was made accurately.

That's the first thing I'm telling you, that the president was well apprised before Tet as to what was coming. . . .